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Simien Trekking – Ethiopia from a Bird’s Eye View

Introduction

Jesus, portrayed as a black man and churches “rising up” down in the hard rock. These oddities, which boldly challenge our idea of the known, are among the always working baits that have won Ethiopia the glory of being a delicacy for travellers. But despite an ancient and quite curious history, this African country is also in possession of wonderful nature. We suggest that you lace up tight your tourist boots, fit your backpack on your back and discover together with us the unsuspected world of the Simien Mountains! On a continent where the words savanna, jungle and desert are put as an all saying label, the nature hasn’t saved even snow capped peaks! Yes, the Simien Mountains is one of the few places in Africa where it snows. But the mountain self has also done its best for that – it has stuck its peaks high into the otherwise hot African sky. Ras Dashen is whole 4620 m high! And it’s going to be yours, as well as other four-thousand footers, only after a few days of excursion through deep gorges, majestic peaks, exotic animals and nice small high-mountain villages. The trek through the Simien Mountains is with no doubt among the most picturesque routes, which every tourist could dream about! And when you come down “to the earth” we have also prepared a relaxing portion of culture for you – the palaces of Gondar. And for dessert – more beautiful nature, this time with the stunning transformation of the calm Lake Tana into the apocalyptic roar of the waterfalls, where the Blue Nile starts.

Special highlights:

Simien National Park – the mountain is not only the highest one in Ethiopia, but also one of the highest mountains in Africa – with its **4620 m Ras Dashen** is the fourth highest mountain peak on the continent. But the geological beauties are just a part of the charm of this mountain. Its flora and fauna are no less interesting. There grows the peculiar plant **Giant Lobelia**, and the slopes are home to rare species of animals – **the endemic wild goat Walia Ibex, the Gelada Baboons, the Ethiopian Wolf**. And in order for the picture to be full, the mountain is neither deprived of human presence – Simien is also a world of herdsmen and of small mountain villages.

Gondar, the capital city of the old Ethiopian Empire, was founded in 1635 by emperor Fasilides. While the city centre is influenced by the later Italian occupation, the real sights here are the old royal buildings – the fortress, the palace, the stables, the library, as well as the three churches.

Lake Tana is the biggest lake in Ethiopia. It is 84 km long and 66 km wide. But more important than its size is the great number of monasteries built on its islands and keeping precious relics – **emperors’ tombs**, ancient wall-paintings. The lake gives origin to **the Blue Nile** – the river starts its long way

with spectacular waterfalls between 37 and 45 m high.

Itinerary:

Day 1: Flight to Addis Abeba via Istanbul.

Day 2: Addis Abeba – Gondar
Arrival in Addis Abeba. Morning flight to Gondar. Transfer to the hotel. Free afternoon in the city.

Day 3: Gondar – Debarke – Sankaber
Morning transfer from Gondar to Debarke (3-4 hours) – after which is the starting point of the trekking - 4 hours to Sankaber (3250 m). Camping.

Day 4: Sankaber – Gich
6 hours trek from Sankaber to Gich (3600 m) around the amazing deep river gorge and waterfall of 155m, traversing Jinbar river and ascend to Gich camp through arable lands and Gich village itself.

Day 5: Gich – Chenek
7-8 hours trek through Imet Gogo (3926 m) and Inatye (4070 m) to Chenek camp (4000 m). The route isn’t very easy, but the incredible views along the way are worth it!

Day 6: Chenek – Ambiko
8-9 hours trek to Ambiko (3200 m). On the way there is a picturesque

view from Bwahit pass (4200 m) to the peak Ras Dashen. Next is a steep descent to the village of Chiro Leba, crossing of Mesheha river and ascend to the camp placed by the side of a village with a small church.

Day 7: Ambiko – Ras Dashen – Ambiko
Setting off before sunrise upwards through the valley, a steep passage to the shelter Mizma (3700 m), from where on a grassed slope starts the climbing up of the highest mountain top in Ethiopia and the fourth highest in Africa – Ras Dashen. After a traverse on the ridge and a steeper climbing you reach a wide saddle plateau at 4250m. Here is also the realm of the Giant Lobelia, reaching the incredible height 8 m! After that, through stony passages you reach the top point – 4620m. Then descend back to Ambiko camp.

Day 8: Ambiko – Arkwazye
6-7 hours trek from Ambiko to Arkwazye through scattered among the hills mountain villages and arable lands.

Day 9: Arkwazye – Chennek
Return to Chennek camp. 5-6 hours trek through the escarpment and back through Bwahit pass.

Day 10: Chennek – Gondar
You meet the sunrise and prepare to leave the mountain. Return to Gondar - transfer around 11.00am. **NB! No visit to village!**

Day 11: Gondar – Bahir Dar
Visit to the royal buildings in the historic centre of Gondar. In the afternoon transfer to Bahir Dar. **NB! No Optional trek!**

Day 12: Lake Tana, Ura Monastery, The Blue Nile Waterfalls
In the morning a boat trip in Lake Tana and visit to Ura Monastery. In the afternoon follows an excursion to the Blue Nile waterfalls. Flight to Addis Abeba.

Day 13: Addis Ababa
Visit to the National Museum, Ethnografical museum and Merkato - the large open market.

Day 14: Departure from Addis Ababa
Departure early in the morning.

Terrain
It involves many ascents and descents as the trail makes its way through the spectacular rugged terrain, often walking along the top of the impressive 1000 meters northern escarpment which offers stunning views across the rock tower studded lowlands through which the trek

passes. 'Imetgogo' is just one of the fine viewpoints found along the way.

- Practical information**
- All nationalities require a full passport that must be valid for 6 months after the intended length of stay. Visas can be obtained prior or upon arrival.
 - There are campings in different places during the trip and there are basic toilets. There are also basic showers at some camps, however washing is always possible with water provided from the staff.
 - January and February are the hottest and driest months. The places we will visit are high and despite the powerful sun, temperatures are pleasant.
 - It might be a good idea to bring pens with you in order to give to some children asking for them along the way.

Accommodation & boarding

- Accommodation in tent camps; European style food prepared on the spot by a professional cook.
- The trekking days are based on Full board – breakfast, lunch and dinner included. The hotel accommodation days are based on BB – bed and breakfast.

Difficulty grade: C

Climate
The mean annual rainfall is 1,550mm falling in two wet seasons, from February to March, and July to September. Temperatures range from a minimum of -2.5°C to 4°C to a maximum of 11°C to 18°C. There are often drying winds during the day; frosts may occur at night, and snow sometimes settles on the summit of Ras Dashen. In the park nights are cold due to the altitude and days are warm. The coldest months are from October to January.

Equipment and clothing:
Nothing compulsory. For the full list with recommended items see "General".

Group size: Min 7-12 persons

The price includes: Food and Drinks (purified packed water); guide; ranger and cook; mule with attendants; all the necessary camping gears and utensils;

The price does not include: tips, entrance fees, alcohol drinks and other personal expenses;

GENERAL
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TOUR TYPES & GRADES
We provide different varieties of tours as regards to their types and difficulty grades!

Whether you will choose individual and group tours with a guide or combined tours with a guide for some part of the trip depends on you. We emphasize on using local experienced guides with knowledge of the local language, culture, history, art, etc. The tours are conducted in the English language. Guides in other languages are available upon request.

GT: Group tours There is a guide accompanying you throughout the whole trip, meeting you at the airport upon arrival and leaving you at the airport again for departure. We use well-trained and experienced local people with good knowledge of English. The group size is normally 7-12 people, if not specially mentioned.

Difficulty grades
In order to prepare yourself for the best of your vacation we recommend that you start planning it in an advance. Good physical condition is required. In order to achieve it we advise you to start walking, jogging or cycling every day. Swimming a couple of times a week is also highly recommended. You do not need much to get yourself in shape. And don't forget that the most important tip for an unforgettable active holiday is to choose a trip which corresponds to your physical condition!

C: Difficult These tours include trekking which is a little harder, normally on a challenging terrain. We take it for granted that you are in good condition and fit. You should be physically prepared at home to get the maximum of the tour. Most of the trekking is done at a greater height (between 3000m and 4000m). As on other tours you are free to skip some treks and have a rest.

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Vaccination
You will need an International Certificate of Vaccination against Yellow Fever. Please check with your doctor if you need additional vaccinations.

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Equipment and clothing:
You should always remember that you must try to keep the weight of your clothing equipment down to a minimum. Your packed rucksack should weigh no more than 10-15 kilograms.
Recommended items: waterproof rucksack (60 l) & daypack (35 l);

walking waterproof boots with suitable ankle support; sandals; light casual shoes for walking and/or for travelling; gaiters; loose, casual trousers for trekking; waterproof trousers; fleece wind stopper jacket; windproof, waterproof outer shell garment (breathable if possible!); hat for sun protection; sunglasses with UV protection; sunscreen lotion and lip balm; water bottle; torch (headlamp); mobile phone; underwear (not cotton); mosquito repellent; trekking sticks.

Money and personal expenses

The Ethiopian Birr is the national currency. Visitors may bring in as much foreign currency as they wish. Credit Cards are not widely accepted outside the major establishments in the cities.

- It is good to have different note of the local currency for buying some souvenirs or something like that if you have like 500 local money (Birr) would be relatively OK!
 - Currently the exchange rate is as follows:
1Euro = 18Birr
1USD = 13Birr
 - Note that tips are usually expected!
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Brief about Ethiopia

Area: 1,104,300 sq.km

Capital: Addis Ababa

Largest towns: Dire Daoua, Gonder, Dessie, Harar

Population: est. 82,825,000

Official language: Amharic. 70 languages are spoken in Ethiopia, English is the most widely spoken European language

Currency: Birr

Borders: Ethiopia is in east-central Africa, bordered on the west by the Sudan, the east by Somalia and Djibouti, the south by Kenya, and the northeast by Eritrea;

Elevation extremes:

lowest point: Denakil Depression -125 m

highest point: Ras Dejen 4,620 m

Geography - note

landlocked - entire coastline along the Red Sea was lost with the de jure independence of Eritrea on 24 May 1993; the Blue Nile, the chief headstream of the Nile, rises in T'ana Hayk (Lake Tana) in northwest Ethiopia; three major crops are believed to have originated in Ethiopia: coffee, grain sorghum, and castor bean

- Land use: arable land: 10.01%

permanent crops: 0.65%

other: 89.34% (2005)

- Religion: Christian 60.8% (Orthodox 50.6%, Protestant 10.2%), Muslim 32.8%, traditional 4.6%, other 1.8% (1994 census)
